

as fraternization, discipline, execution of service, and battle orders. And I asked the committeemen whether they agreed with me on the need to discuss these topics frankly.

The chairman of the committee asked me whether I regarded the regiment's decision to join the Communist party collectively a breach of military discipline. I answered that the resolution was absurd. A regiment as such cannot join a party and I had no time to talk about nonsense. The only trouble was that the regiment, by its resolution, had alienated itself from the army and placed itself in the position of a leper colony. I had come to see if there was any truth in the widely held opinion in the army that the Novo-Ladoga Regiment was a bunch of cowards, capable of betraying other troops by refusing to obey battle orders. If this opinion were true, something had to be done to protect the rest of the army against the danger of treason. If the suspicion were false, something should be done to restore the good name of the regiment.

The chairman explained that the men knew very well that the by-laws of the Communist party did not provide for collective membership. The decision "to join the party" was just a way of expressing the political views of the majority of soldiers on that particular day.

"Why didn't you make this clear to the army long ago?" I asked.

He replied that the regiment had been insulted by the charges hurled at it. "Moreover," he added, "many people who sympathized with the left in June have changed their views since the July days."

"I am happy to hear this," I said. "I know how rumors spread in the army. Perhaps your comrades have misunderstood you. I was told that the Novo-Ladoga Regiment declared it would take no part in the imperialist war and would obey only the Communist party. As soldiers, you must agree that we would have a strange army if each regiment were to decide from what party it takes its orders."

The committeemen, red in the face, confessed that the resolution had some foolish words but insisted they were just a slip. Then I said, "I must trust you. A few weeks ago I saw a radical change in the mood of the Petrograd garrison. Many enlisted men had passed resolutions endorsing the Bolshevik slogans, and then they all joined the majority in the Executive Committee in condemning the same slogans. Such things happen sometimes."

The committeemen liked my approach. "Perhaps we are not the best regiment in the army," the chairman said modestly, "but we are honest and say what we think. And when we see that we were wrong, we say so."

"It would be fine if all soldiers were this way," I replied diplomatically. The conference ended in a friendly spirit.

The regiment assembled before the tents. The soldiers stood in